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LETTER DATED 17 MARCH 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF BURUNDI TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Burundi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Burundi, Mr. Luc Rukingama, has entrusted me with the task of expressing to you and all the members of the Security Council all the appreciation of the Government of Burundi for holding an informal meeting of the Council on the basis of the Arria Formula in order to exchange views with the Minister on the recent political developments in the Republic of Burundi.

I should like to take this opportunity to transmit to you the text of his statement to the Security Council and request you to have it circulated as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Gamaliel NDARUZANIYE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Burundi to the members of the Security Council at Headquarters, New York, on 17 March 1998

1. It is a pleasure for us at the outset to express appreciation to the authorities of the Security Council and to the United Nations Secretariat for enabling us to inform this august assembly about Burundi during our brief visit to New York.

1. The Burundian crisis

2. For four years, Burundi has been experiencing one of the most serious political crises of its history. After the tragedy of October 1993, which was marked by the assassination of President Ndadaye and acts of genocide causing the death of hundreds of thousands of people, the social and political situation deteriorated dangerously owing to the inability of successive governments to manage the crisis. The lack of authority on the part of the State prolonged the disorder to the extent that there was total confusion in Burundi by the middle of 1996: continual strikes, work stoppages virtually everywhere, the closing of schools, widespread violence in the streets and public markets, the cutting off of water and electricity and so forth.

3. In view of such a desperate situation, President Pierre Buyoya returned to public affairs in order to halt the violence and dispel a spectre of genocide. Our Government undertook, from its first hours of existence, to organize a peace process based on a dialogue without exclusion and political negotiations open to all parties. It committed itself to restoring peace and security, the prerequisites for the democratization process.

2. The security improves

4. Throughout the territory of Burundi, peace is gradually returning in towns and in the countryside. The population had resumed its everyday activities and the young people have returned to school. Nevertheless, isolated and sporadic acts are perpetrated here and there by tribal groups bent on genocide. These terrorists are encouraged by the lack of any pressure on the part of the international community, by the countries that shelter them and by the economic sanctions which were imposed almost two years ago on the population and the Government and considerably limit the means for protecting innocent people.

5. Resolving the question of the rebels, which is linked to the thorny problem of the refugees in the Great Lakes region, must be based on agreement among all the countries concerned and there are many of them in our area.

3. A peace process that is still moving forward

6. There are two aspects to the Burundian peace process: the domestic aspect and the external one. Based on the national debate, the domestic initiative is designed to bring about general support on the part of the population for the

peace plan and to ensure their full participation. Several seminars and conferences attended by representatives of all the political forces have already been organized. Two high-level round tables have been held and the conclusions reached at them are among the more encouraging ones. Preparations are under way for a third round table. The Government and the Parliament have been working together for many months in order to direct the peace process and promote reconciliation. A joint delegation of the two institutions has just completed a number of missions to explain their objectives in the region.

7. The mediator, Mwalimu Julius K. Nyerere, recently informed me at a workshop on the resolution of conflicts in Africa held in Arusha at the beginning of the year that he would give the greatest consideration to the domestic aspect of the peace process and that he was even ready to send his representative to Bujumbura.

8. Externally, the negotiation process had achieved some results and it would be unfair to pass over them in silence. Peace talks were begun in Rome between the Government and the main armed group, the Conseil national de défense de la démocratie (CNDD) before they were blocked by a premature disclosure on the part of the latter partner. A peace conference attended by approximately 50 representatives of Burundian political forces and about 30 international observers was held at the headquarters of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) from 26 to 28 September 1997. A similar meeting was just held in Fribourg, Switzerland, with the assistance of Africa Synergies.

9. The Arusha initiative has not made much headway owing to a lack of flexibility on the part of the mediation body and a methodology based on force, occasional military constraint and violence, which proved to be, as was to be expected, completely counterproductive. We shall now touch upon a number of aspects which constitute major obstacles to the peace process.

4. <u>The economic sanctions are blocking the peace process</u>

10. These measures, which were very hastily decided upon on 31 July 1996, are unlimited with regard to their objective and duration and are illegal and unfair, added a series of misfortunes and suffering to the already pitiable drama caused by the civil conflict. Professor Pinheiro, the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the human rights situation in Burundi recently stressed, at the end of last year, the disastrous consequences of the economic blockade.

11. It was generally thought that the latest Summit in Kampala was to have lifted the sanctions as, moreover, had been proposed by the Council of Ministers in preparing for the Summit.

12. From Brazzaville to Hanoi, in Harare, Ouagadougou, Tripoli, Lomé, Addis Ababa, Lusaka (Comesa), Dakar, Paris, Rome, Libreville and Geneva, major international forums and leading institutions have strongly condemned these measures, which have led to the starvation and death of the poorest people while at the same time enriching the wealthiest in the region.

5. The harmful role played by certain neighbouring countries

13. The failure to respect the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees by certain neighbouring countries as well as the hospitality provided to the rebel groups does not favour the creation of an atmosphere conducive to dialogue. The acts of violence perpetrated by the armed groups strengthens the front made up of those who are opposed to negotiations.

14. The establishment of a tripartite commission on the repatriation of Burundian refugees represents a positive approach. The success of this mechanism will depend on the contribution by the political decision makers.

15. Other actions also may promote the peace process.

6. Promoting communication

16. The continuing isolation to which Burundi has been subjected as a result of the blockade demonstrates in essence a refusal to engage in dialogue. The closing of the air, land, lake and other frontiers has sealed off the physical channels of any communication among human beings. This ostracism reflects a hermetic approach, not a relationship based on dialogue, which is characterized by openness and seeks to bring together and reconcile parties. We therefore call for the lifting of all these barriers to the peace process.

7. Burundi must be at the centre of any search for a lasting solution

17. The manoeuvres aimed at excluding Burundi from meetings at which it constitutes the agenda must cease. The Burundian people are not prepared to accept instructions without consultation. Furthermore, in Africa one does not shave the head of a man who is not present.

8. The Government of Burundi is maintaining its commitments

18. While strengthening security and pursuing the peace process, the Government has gradually prepared the way for meeting a number of the conditions set by the Arusha group. The following steps have already been taken:

Re-establishment of political parties;

Resumed functioning of Parliament;

Holding of peace conferences and negotiations;

Dismantling of most of the sites for protecting the displaced and regrouped persons;

Release of all the key figures concerned.

19. Former President Ntibantunganya, former President Bagaza and the President of the National Assembly today enjoy complete freedom of movement. The Public Ministry, owing to a lack of conclusive evidence, has just closed the case concerning Mr. Léonce Ngendakumana, the President of the National Assembly.

Conclusion

20. The Government of Burundi wishes once again to thank the Security Council for all the consideration accorded to our country here today. We should be grateful if you:

Maintained your support for the peace process in Burundi and helped to improve the atmosphere and the chances for success;

Supported the lifting of the economic sanctions in order to give peace a chance;

Acceded to our request concerning the establishment of an international criminal court on Burundi in order to judge crimes against humanity and genocide;

Advocated not only humanitarian assistance but also reconstruction and the resumption of development cooperation.